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## HIGH SCHOOL SELF GOVERNMENT

MR. THURBER's article in the January number of the SCHOOL REVIEW and his invitation for an expression of opinion on high school self government lead me to submit for suggestion and criticism the plan that has obtained in the Pratt Institute High School, Brooklyn, for a year past. It differs materially from the plan of the Warren High School, described in the January number. In Warren the constitution requires certain students to take note of those of their fellows who break the rules laid down in the constitution. As the rules and regulations of the board of directors of the school are expressly made a part of that instrument it appears that the students on signing the constitution pledge themselves, whenever they shall be elected senators, to report any fellow student seen breaking any rules three times in two weeks. It obligates upon the students the detection of wrong-doing and the punishment of the offender.

When self-government was discussed at the Pratt High School, the students showed a willingness to coöperate with the management of the school, but, in their discussions, expressly declared that they did not want to be put in the position of spying upon one another or of punishing students. As one of the boys said: "The teachers are hired to govern the school and it seems to me to be their place to make complaints when we don't do as we should. If the teachers are willing to advise with us about what is the fair thing to do, I think we recognize the compliment, but it will never work to make the students detectives and police." I think that this sentiment is so universal and so strong among students that any plan of self-government that goes contrary to it will be inconsistent with the present conditions of school management. A school and the public have so long looked upon the principal of the school as its executive officer and will so persistently hold him responsible for what

punishment is inflicted on a student, that I believe the plan of delegating any of the executive powers of that officer to those so irresponsible as students must be would be unwise. At any rate, the Pratt Institute students expressly declined to assume such powers, but showed, as did the Warren students, a willingness to share in the law-making and judicial functions of the principal.

The Pratt plan was suggested when Mr. C. M. Pratt, president of the board of trustees of Pratt Institute, was a member of the committee of adjustment of the system of student government in Amherst College. He made general suggestions and advised that the members of the school work out the particulars. When the senior class of the high school were invited to suggest plans for coöperation they had just finished an extended study of the Constitution of the United States. Their own constitution shows the effect of such study. It recognizes three branches of government: the legislative, composed of a senate (teachers) and an assembly (seniors); the executive (the principal); and the judicial (an equal number of teachers and students). As the seniors made the constitution they felt that a certain amount of dignity, experience, and brains, was requisite in a legislator, and so excluded the underclassmen from that office. To the school court, however, two underclassmen are eligible. A peculiar feature of the constitution is that it acknowledges its limitations and professes to be a delation of only the powers mentioned in it, the rest remaining where they usually are, with the principal. It seems unnecessary to say that this provision was inserted when the instrument came to the senate of teachers. About a year was consumed in sending the constitution back and forth between the teachers and the students. Several joint sessions were necessary and several compromises had to be made. One feature of the constitution which appeals to me is its failure to discriminate between students and teachers. It is for members of the school whether instructors or pupils. The principal is in honor bound to enforce its laws in the case of both.

When the constitution was finished, the whole school signed

it. Since then, when any new student or teacher is added to membership, he signs the following :

#### DECLARATION OF INTENTION

[The provisions governing the conduct of members of the school are comprised in the school constitution, established by students and instructors, February 1896, and subject to amendment only by joint action of students and instructors. Before an applicant can become a member of the school he is required to declare his intention to support the constitution. This may be done by signing the following declaration.]

Believing in the principles of self-government as necessary to the most intelligent and exalted citizenship, I hereby declare that if I am admitted as a member of the Pratt Institute High School, I will support the constitution of that school to the best of my ability. — —

[A copy of the school constitution may be consulted at any time in the high school office.]

The plan has worked beautifully. It has a beneficent effect upon both teachers and students. Every student knows that he is free to appeal to the school court whenever he regards the requirement of a teacher or of the principal as unjust. Every teacher and the principal feels that any whimsical or unduly severe exaction is subject to a review by three instructors and three students; and as a result there has not been one appeal since the plan was instituted. The constitution is thus like a good stomach, it is there but scarcely anyone realizes it. One feels that he is in a community where he is governed the best because governed the least. I submit the constitution as printed and distributed to the school.

#### CONSTITUTION OF THE PRATT INSTITUTE HIGH SCHOOL

(Adopted February 15, 1896)

##### PREAMBLE

We, the members of the Pratt Institute High School, in order to establish a common understanding, promote justice and good order, forward the general welfare, raise the standard of truth and honor among the members of the Pratt Institute High School, and keep in practice the principles of good citizenship, hereby establish and subscribe to the following constitution :

##### ARTICLE I

SECTION 1. All legislative powers herein granted shall be vested in the high school senate and in the high school assembly.

SEC. 2. The high school senate shall consist of the officers and instructors of the high school.

SEC. 3. The high school assembly shall consist of the enrolled members of the senior class.

SEC. 4. The two bodies collectively shall be known as the high school congress.

#### ARTICLE II

SECTION 1. There shall be a high school court, composed of four members from the high school senate, two from the high school assembly, one from the junior class, and one from the sophomore class.

SEC. 2. The delegates to the high school court shall be elected by their respective bodies at the beginning of the term, and shall serve one term or until their successors are elected.

SEC. 3. Every member of the high school senate or high school assembly, so elected, shall serve in the high school court, unless for reasons given the body that elected him, it shall excuse him and elect a successor.

Any member of the high school court may delegate his powers for any session of the court upon presentation to the court of a written order countersigned by the high school principal.

In case of absence of any member from the high school court at any sitting, the vacancy shall be filled by the remaining members of the court, who may appoint to such vacancy a substitute from the same body that the vacant member represents.

SEC. 4. The high school court shall meet on call of the high school principal, but he is bound to call the court in case of appeal from the decision made by any member of the high school.

SEC. 5. The high school court shall act upon all cases of discipline brought before it by the high school principal or by an appeal.

SEC. 6. The voting of the high school court shall be by secret ballot.

SEC. 7. The school court shall have the power to summon any accused person before it, and an accused person shall have the privilege of appearing once before the court to defend himself from charges. He may have the right to select a counsel to act for him and with him.

#### ARTICLE III

SECTION 1. The constitution recognizes the functions of the principal of the high school, as established by the trustees of the Pratt Institute. The provisions of this constitution are recognized as the exercise of powers delegated to the senate and high school assembly and high school court by the principal of the high school in good faith, and not to be abrogated except by both senate and assembly, or by the action of the trustees of Pratt Institute.

SEC. 2. The principal of the high school shall execute penalties for mis-

demeanors herein to be stipulated, and those which have been adjudged by the high school court.

SEC. 3. All powers not herein expressly delegated shall remain in the hands of the principal of the high school.

#### ARTICLE IV

Offenses punishable shall be as follows :

1. Defacing desks, furniture, or other parts of the equipment of the institute.

2. Smoking in the institute building, play grounds, athletic field, or anywhere in the square bounded by the outside lines of DeKalb, Steuben, Willoughby, and Hall streets.

Repeated failure to be on time at the beginning of school, at class, in completion of work, or in returning of reports. More than six unexcused tardinesses or three absences in any term shall result in warning the member that another unexcused tardiness or absence will result in suspension.

4. Conduct unbecoming members of Pratt Institute High School.

5. Repeated neglect of work.

6. Meddling with the property of the other members of the institute.

#### ARTICLE V

All members of the high school shall have the right of appeal to the high school court in all matters pertaining to school discipline.

#### ARTICLE VI

##### *Amendment*

This constitution may be established and at any time amended by a majority vote of the high school senate and a majority vote of the high school assembly at any meeting, provided a notice of proposed amendment shall have been posted on the high school bulletin one week previous, and this amendment is approved by the principal of the high school. Amendments may prevail over the principal's veto on receiving a three-quarter vote of the high school senate and high school assembly.

SEC. 2. In matters of discipline not herein provided for, the high school senate and high school assembly shall have the power to legislate, subject to the approval of the principal of the high school, in the same manner as provided for in case of amendments to this constitution.

W. A. McANDREW

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